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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Loudoun Resident Loans Emancipation Day Artifacts for *Myth & Memory* Exhibition**

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For Immediate Release

In January, the Library of Virginia opened its signature 2007 exhibition, *Myth & Memory: Understanding 400 Years of Virginia History*, exploring how and why Virginians have remembered their collective past through commemorations, celebrations, and other public events. The exhibition illustrates how the commemorations of the founding of Jamestown as well as commemorations of other events, such as Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, the bicentennial of George Washington's birth (1932), Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and Civil War centennials reflect Virginians' perceptions of the commonwealth's history.

Among the artifacts attracting attention are a dozen or so lent by Elaine E. Thompson of Hamilton from the Loudoun County Emancipation Association. Her father, Thomas E. Thompson, was the last president of the Association. The items include a minute book, receipts, a Loudoun County Emancipation Association stock certificate, a picnic basket and an ice cream scoop. All are reminders of a celebration once held by African American communities across Virginia.

The Loudoun County Emancipation Association was incorporated in December 1909 "to provide for the celebration of 22nd day of September as Emancipation day or the day of Freedom, to cultivate good fellowship, to work for the betterment of the race educationally, morally and materially." The group sold stock in the Association, borrowed money, and purchased 10.5 acres in Purcellville in western Loudoun County. On the site the Association built a 1,200-seat tabernacle, which was the center for Emancipation Day celebrations and gatherings.

The group chose September 22 for their celebration. It was the day President Lincoln announced his emancipation plans to his Cabinet. Other communities celebrated on January 1, April 3, or June 19. The final Emancipation Day celebration in Loudoun was held in 1967.

*Myth & Memory* uses artifacts, images, and media from the Library's holdings and from other institutions and individuals like Elaine Thompson to explain how historical memory is created and shaped through public events such as commemorations, pageants, and parades, giving meaning to historical events and teaching lessons to the community about those events. Just as communities develop a corporate memory, individuals also develop a personal understanding of their place in community and history. Paraphrasing the historian Carl Becker, they become their own historians, absorbing communal values and lessons through individual experience.

*Myth and Memory* continues through December 15, 2007, and is free and open to the public.

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